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General

PIET MONDRIAN

the earlier years

1957

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Mondrian's later work is well known in the United States. From time to time excellent early examples of his painting have been included in American exhibitions. But the individuality of his later work and our familiarity with it commonly lead us to forget the quality and persistent searchings which marked Mondrian's painting long before he had refined that pictorial idiom which today we at once associate with his name.

For these reasons this selection from Mondrian's work has been focused on his evolution between the years 1904 and 1920. A few later canvases are included as reminders of the work with which we are more familiar. But it is through Mondrian's paintings of the earlier years that we can best appreciate those steps by which he found the way to that final, deeply personal expression which is his and to a concrete realization of his theoretical concepts of form.

Unpublished letter from Mondrian, New York, 1943.

353 East 56 St. May 24.

Dear Mr. Sweeney,

To complete our conversation the following could be useful to you work.

You know that the intention of Cubism — in any case in the beginning — was to express volume. The three-dimensial space (natural) remained then established.+ This was opposed to my conception of abstraction which is that this space just has to be destroyed. To consequence I came to destroy volume using the plane. Then the problème was to destroy the plane also. This I did by means of lines cutting the planes. But still the plane remained too much in tact—

So I came to make only lines and brought the color in these. Now the only problème is to destroy these lines also through mutual oppositions.

Perhaps I express my self not clear in this but it can be explained you why I left the cubism influence. Best wishes from Mondrian.

+ It shows again that Cubism "air fond" remained abstraction but not abstract.

First aim: universal expression

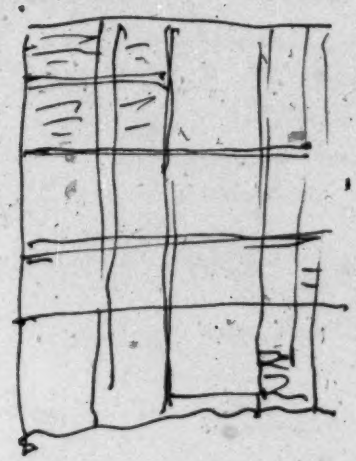
Plastic exigence to this:
equivalence of vertical and
horizontal expression -

This is not in fig. A.
vertical predominates, Gothic
expression results.

Second aim: concrete universal
expression.

In fig. B. there is equivalence of
horizontal and vertical expression,
but thus the whole is of more
universal expression than fig. A.
But this expression is vague,
for the vertical and horizontal is
confused - The structure is as lost.
In later pictures, the structure
and the means of expression are
concrete and in mutual equivalence.

Period for C. was necessary to approach concrete structure



C

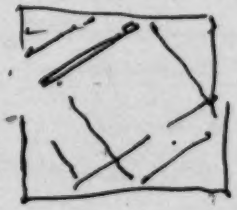
In A color is unique.

In B there is only black and white. This brings us far from reality.

In C. and D. latest picture colors are primary: concrete.

Many appreciate in my former work what I did not want to express but established by incapacity to express what I wanted: dynamic movements in equilibrium.
Continuous struggle for this brought me nearer.

In his later works Doesburg tryed to destroy static expression by diagonal position of his lines.
But in this way the feeling of physical equilibrium which is necessary to enjoy a work of art is lost.



Relationship with architecture, of vertical and horizontal position, is broken.
The picture, lines in this position is in lines of 45° not the picture. The advantage is the longer lines in this way produced.

only the limitation of the picture

Important to discern two sort of equilibrium:

1 static balance.

2 dynamic equilibrium.

For this reason it is understandable that some oppose against equilibrium in art, some others defend it.

The great struggle for artist is to annihile static equilibrium in the way of continuous opposition of the means of expression.

It is always in human's nature to look static balance. This (of course balance) is necessary to existance in time. Pure vitality in the succession of time destroys always this balance (and is continued) (Art is expression of this vitality. abstract)

PAINTINGS

TREE IN LANDSCAPE. *Circa 1905. Oil on canvas, 9¼ x 14⅜".*
Collection Gemeente Museum, The Hague.

DYING CHRYSANTHEMUM. *1907-08. Oil on canvas, 33¼ x 21¼".*
Collection S. B. Slijper, Gemeente Museum, The Hague.

THE RED CLOUD. *1907-08. Oil on board mounted on wood, 25¼ x 29⅝".*
Collection Gemeente Museum, The Hague.

WINDMILL IN SUNLIGHT. *1908. Oil on canvas, 44⅛ x 34¼".*
Collection S. B. Slijper, Gemeente Museum, The Hague.

DUNE. *Circa 1909. Oil on cardboard, 13 x 18⅛".*
Collection S. B. Slijper, Gemeente Museum, The Hague.

DUNE. *1909-10. Oil on cardboard, 11⅝ x 15⅝".*
Collection S. B. Slijper, Gemeente Museum, The Hague.

DUNE. *Circa 1909. Oil on canvas, 14⅛ x 17¾".*
Collection S. B. Slijper, Gemeente Museum, The Hague.

THE RED TREE. *1910. Oil on canvas, 27⅝ x 39".*
Collection Gemeente Museum, The Hague.

CALLA LILIES. *1910. Oil on canvas, 19¾ x 13¼".*
Collection S. B. Slijper, Gemeente Museum, The Hague.

MILL NEAR DOMBURG. *1910. Oil on canvas, 59⅛ x 33⅞".*
Collection S. B. Slijper, Gemeente Museum, The Hague.

NUDE. *Circa 1911. Oil on canvas, 55⅛ x 38⅝".*
Collection S. B. Slijper, Gemeente Museum, The Hague.

LANDSCAPE. *Circa 1911. Oil on canvas, 24⅛ x 30¾".*
Collection S. B. Slijper, Gemeente Museum, The Hague.

LANDSCAPE WITH TREES. *Circa 1911. Oil on canvas, 47½ x 39¾".*
Collection S. B. Slijper, Gemeente Museum, The Hague.

STILL LIFE WITH GINGERPOT, II. *1911. Oil on canvas, 36⅛ x 47¼".*
Collection S. B. Slijper, Gemeente Museum, The Hague.

THE GREY TREE. *Circa 1911. Oil on canvas, 30⅞ x 42⅜".*
Collection S. B. Slijper, Gemeente Museum, The Hague.

APPLE TREE IN BLOSSOM. *Circa 1911. Oil on canvas, 30¾ x 41¾".*
Collection Gemeente Museum, The Hague.

COMPOSITION: TREES. *1911. Oil on canvas, 38⅝ x 25⅝".*
Collection S. B. Slijper, Gemeente Museum, The Hague.

COMPOSITION No. 3, TREES. *Oil on canvas, 37½ x 31½".*
Collection S. B. Slijper, Gemeente Museum, The Hague.

EUCALYPTUS TREE IN GREY AND TAN. *1912. Oil on canvas, 31¾ x 25½".*
Collection Sidney Janis, New York.

COMPOSITION 7. *1913. Oil on canvas, 41⅞ x 45".*
Collection The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

COMPOSITION No. 6. *1914. Oil on canvas, 34⅝ x 24".*
Collection S. B. Slijper, courtesy Stedelijk van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven.

COMPOSITION 8. *1914. Oil on canvas, 37¼ x 21⅞".*
Collection The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

FACADE 5. *1914. Oil on canvas, 22 x 33½".*
Collection Sidney Janis, New York.

COMPOSITION. *1916. Oil on canvas and wood strip, 47¼ x 29½".*
Collection The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

COMPOSITION WITH LINES (PLUS-MINUS). *1917. Oil on canvas, 42½ x 42½".*
Collection Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo.

LOZENGE WITH GREY LINES. *1918. Oil on canvas, 47⅝" diagonal.*
Collection Gemeente Museum, The Hague.

COMPOSITION: BRIGHT COLOR PLANES WITH GREY LINES.
1919. Oil on canvas, 35¼" diagonal.
Collection Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo.

COMPOSITION. CHECKERBOARD, LIGHT COLORS.
1919. Oil on canvas, 33⅞ x 41¾".
Collection S. B. Slijper, Gemeente Museum, The Hague.

COMPOSITION. CHECKERBOARD, DARK COLORS.
1919. Oil on canvas, 33⅛ x 40¼".
Collection S. B. Slijper, Gemeente Museum, The Hague.

COMPOSITION IN GREY, BLUE, YELLOW AND RED.
1921. Oil on canvas, 19⅞ x 15⅞".
Lent anonymously.

COMPOSITION WITH YELLOW LINES. *1933. Oil on canvas, 52⅝" diagonal.*
Collection Gemeente Museum, The Hague.

RED CORNER. *1938. Oil on canvas, 50¾" diagonal.*
Lent anonymously.

COMPOSITION. *1939-42. Oil on canvas, 35¼ x 31⅛".*
Lent anonymously.

DRAWINGS

SEATED GIRL. *Circa 1904. Charcoal, 6⅛ x 4½".*
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Maxwell S. McKnight, Scarsdale, New York.

LIGHTHOUSE AT WESTKAPELLE. *Circa 1909. Ink, 11¾ x 9⅝".*
Collection S. B. Slijper, Gemeente Museum, The Hague.

SELF-PORTRAIT. *1910-11. Charcoal, 19½ x 29".*
Collection S. B. Slijper, Gemeente Museum, The Hague.

TREE. *1910-11. Charcoal, 22½ x 33¼".*
Collection Gemeente Museum, The Hague.

OVAL CUBIST COMPOSITION. *1911-12. Charcoal, 33½ x 27⅝".*
Collection S. B. Slijper, Gemeente Museum, The Hague.

CATHEDRAL. *1914. Charcoal, 19⅛ x 28¼".*
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Matter, New York.

PIER AND OCEAN. *1914. Charcoal, 19¾ x 24⅞".*
Collection S. B. Slijper, Gemeente Museum, The Hague.

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Broadway Boogie Woogie, 1943.

For this painting is in a sense the summation of the researches of Mondrian's earlier years and their developments after 1920; at the same time it is an indication of the direction his subsequent explorations would probably have taken had he lived.

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. 7 East 72nd Street, New York 21, N.Y.